

Interview with  
Judge William B. Hutton  
Cucamonga, California  
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I became judge here in 1944, which was shortly after the braceros first began coming to this area. Believe me, in those days they were a rough bunch. We ~~xx~~ would get eight, ten, or twelve nationals in court here every Monday morning. The charges were usually drunkenness, fighting, ~~knig~~ and things like that. We had a lot of knifings; that's the weapon nationals prefer to use. Occasionally there would be a shooting. Also, the cases of homicide, of course, ended up in Superior Court in San Bernardino, after being processed through my court. But, the lesser charges I would handle myself. The Mexican-Nationals, you see, are completely subject to American law while they are in this country, even though they are citizens of another country.

They came up thinking this was a wide-open country and that they could do whatever they pleased. They came up just for kicks more than for anything else; and then to make things worse they had plenty of money--more than the local people. So, they would go down to the north section in North Town, as we call it and throw their money around. They would spend all on girls particularly. Naturally enough, the local boys didn't like that even a little bit, and this is where the trouble started. There were brawls between the nationals and the locals quite regularly, and they would usually end-up with somebody getting pretty well carved. In many cases, the girls that the braceros got mixed up with were already married and with children. The husbands may have been overseas or something like that. We pleaded with the manager of the local camp to keep the men in camp and to keep them out of North Town, but we didn't have much success with this until fairly recently. About 1952, when



Mr. Orton took over the camp, I must say that he has kept things fairly well under control. In fact, I have accused Ray Orton and Joe Iselas of holding their own court in camp and taking the money out of my pocket. You see, in my court, I get paid according to the case load; so much per case. The load has dropped way off since they began keeping the nationals under little better control.

Has the Bracero Program had any impact upon the morals of the local community? What morals? Mexicans don't have any morals to start with. There are no legal marriages down in North Town. Oh, maybe a few, but nothing to speak of. It is not at all unusual for a woman to have five or six kids, each of them with a different father and none of them legitimate.

Has the Bracero Program had any influence on the economic conditions among the Mexican-American population? I would say that the nationals have tended to raise wages. Back when the program started, the government made us pay them more than what we had been paying the locals, 75¢ an hour. A bunch of us went in to talk with Congressman Sheppard from San Bernardino, he is a good fellow; and asked him, "Isn't there anything we can do to keep the wages down on these nationals?" He said, "I sympathize with your position, but I am afraid it is out of my hands." As far as competition with the local people for jobs is concerned, I would say that the program has not created any unemployment. All the locals who want to work are able to work at the Kaiser Steel Plant, or at Lockhead over in Ontario, or in one of the other industries. Quite a number of them have jobs in Los Angeles and commute everyday. The local boys who are unemployed are that way because they choose to be. I have a lot of them coming into this court on various charges, traffic



violations, and so forth; and they will frequently plead poverty. If the fine is say, \$25. They will say 'I just haven't got the money, Judge.' So, I come back and say, 'All right then, it's jail for you.' Then they say, 'Well, give me a couple of days to see what I can do.' They don't much care for the idea of jail, so in two or three days, they come back and they pay their fine. They are always able to raise the money by working for a few days and they could be working fulltime if they wanted to; but the point is that they won't work in citrus or grapes, or tomatoes now, even if you had it to them on a silver platter. So, I think you could say, that, unless all the industrial plants in the area were to suddenly close down, the Bracero Program has decidedly not had any all effects upon the economic standing of the local people.

I am a grower myself. I have a little citrus outside of town here and at one time or another, I have dabbled around with tomatoes and various other things. I used to be on the Board of Directors of one of the ~~packing~~ big, local ~~packing~~ grape packing houses. When the program was just starting up, I was put in charge of finding housing for our nationals. Well, I scouted around town here and finally located a grocery store that had gone out of business; so we fixed that place up: Put in plumbing and added windows, and so forth and so on. It was nothing fancy, mind you, but, I ~~I~~ can guarantee one thing; it was a heap better than what they are accustomed to in Mexico. I have been down to Ensenada and places like that, and so, I know what I am talking about. As far as feeding is concerned, we found somebody who was willing to take on this job. They set up a sort of restuarant or boarding house you might call it, right next door to the grocery where the men were sleeping; and the



men would go over there for their meals. We tried letting them cook their own meals for awhile, but, this didn't work out so well. This is the way it used to be with all of the packing houses; having its own crew of nationals which it was responsible for. If you want my opinion, I think that this setup was better than the present setup: where you have all the men in a centralized housing unit, and the growers or packing house or whoever it might be, has to go in there everyday; maybe 15 or 20 miles, to pick up its men and furthermore they nick them plenty for the so-called privilege of belonging to the association. You can bet that the camp manager is getting a hefty salary and the assistant camp manager, and so on down the line. It is a pretty top-heavy system.

For a number of years we have been dependent upon one form of foreign labor or another in this area. We had ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ Japanese in here at one time; we had Filipinos; and during the war, we had quite a number of Italian prisoners-of-war. One of the prisoners, incidentally, married a local girl and stayed here. He is now running a shoe repair shop on the main street, and is one of our best citizens. I don't know exactly how he got permission to stay in this country. Prior to 1954, we had a large number of wetbacks around here and, of course, they were different from the nationals in that they were living right mixed in with the community. There was nothing wrong with the wetbacks. I have hired them myself. Three or four years ago, for example, the local Constable came to me one day and said, 'Could you use a good worker on your place?' I said sure I could use somebody to help with the irrigating; somebody to clean around the stand-pipes; so send him around. The Constable did, I don't know where he had lo-



cated this fellow, but anyway, it turned out that he was a wetback. He worked around my place for sometime and was one of the best workers I have ever had. But, he was picked up and shipped out during the big round-up they had in 1954.

As long as there is citrus in the country, we are going to need the Mexican-National. Of course, they are tearing out the citrus grooves pretty fast around here, so maybe they will cut down on the need, but I don't know how se would get along without them. It is true that most of them, when they first come up don't know much about ranch work. I mean by that, the kind of ranch work we have around here. But, I will say one thing for them, that you can teach them; and I will say another thing for most of them, they are willing to work and work hard. When I raised tomatoes I had three men, three nationals, sent up from the camp. Two of them worked the way I wanted them to without any complaints whatsoever. The other one wasn't so good, he said to me after the day's work, "Señor, you don't need a man you need a horse." I guess he didn't like the fact that I stood right behind them, driving them on. No, the local boys simply won't do this kind of work. They are interested either in loafing, or in working in something that pays more for less work.

Of course, it would be nice if things could be the way they were before World War 2. We used to pay ~~in~~ our pickers 5¢ a box for oranges, and the local people were happy to get it. They didn't have such big ideas in those days. A man picked a 100 boxes for me by 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and then He came to me and said, "I would like my \$5 now, please.", he figured this was all he needed and so he was through for the day; but, he would be back the next day. Now, we are having to pay from 35 to 40¢ per box for oranges, and you can see that this has taken most of the profit out of it for most of us growers.



Quite a large number of braceros have married local girls, and quite a large number of these girls returned with their husbands to Mexico. Why? Because their husbands had money. I told you that these braceros were making good wages in this country.

Lately, as I told you, there has been much less contact between the nationals and the local Mexican-Americans. This means I suppose that there has been now than there used to be and less friction also. I tell you things ~~used to be~~ use to be really tough. They got so bad, that I had to start cracking the whip unusually hard. It got my dander up to see these same guys from the national camp, showing up in my court week after week; and so I warned them, and I warned the camp manager, that if they kept showing up, I was going to throw the book at them. Well, we kept having repeaters after that, and I was as good as my word. I did throw the book at them, I socked them with some really stiff fines. The camp manager got so mad at me, he didn't speak to me; and he had the ear of the Consul in San Bernardino, and so the Consul got mad at me too. One time I went to a banquet over in San Bernardino where the Consul made a speech. He devoted a good deal of time ~~in~~ in saying what a lousy so and so the judge over in Cucamonga was. He knew perfectly well that I was sitting there in the audience, but I didn't care, I just took it all in. As things worked out not long after, that, we got both a new camp manager and a new Consul.

I wouldn't say that the trouble between the nationals and the locals has completely disappeared, by any means. Not very long ago we had a case here where a local girl hit a national right alongside of the head with a beer bottle. That poor guy was really in sad shape. She practically took his ear off, as well as practically caving in the side of his head. From all that I could gather, the man was probably in the right. He probably had a legitimate grievance and I ~~should have~~ probably should have sent the woman to



jail for a stretch; but, we never could get any proof because this poor guy could never get anybody to testify for him. There were lots and lots of people in the bar when all this happened, but, strangely enough none of them could remember a thing. ~~Finally~~ He finally lined up one friendly witness who was going to come in here and testify on his behalf; but, when we finally got that witness in court her memory seemed very suddenly to slip a gear or two; so, we had to throw the case out of court.